Writing *Winning* Proposals

March 2015

amshc
Agjencia për Mbështetjen
e Shoqërisë Civile

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What are here to accomplish?

Australian AID

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Qatar Foundation
for education, science and community development

Canadian International Development Agency

WORLD BANK

BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation

Sida

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Workshop Rules

AIR FRANCE

Airbus A 320
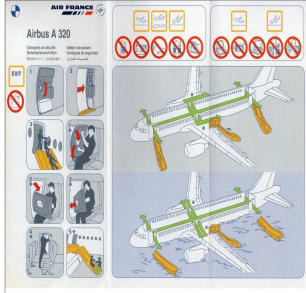
- **Rule #1:** Cell phones on off (or silent)
- **Rule #2:** Speak Shqip if you feel more comfortable
- **Rule #3:** Relax, take risks, and share
- **Rule #4:** Support the facilitator & participate

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Expectations

What are your expectations from this workshop?

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Who are We?

When did you last feel like this person?

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A few background notes

- Proposals are not fundraising and fundraising is NOT proposals!

- Proposal writing and fundraising are not exact sciences: don't always expect 1 + 1 = 2 in this field.

- There are always exceptions: bad proposals can win and good proposals can lose!

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The 2 Ps of Proposals

A proposal is a PLAN

+

a PERSUASIVE document

Writing a proposal is a matter of persuasion (always assume that your reader is a skeptical, busy person with A LOT of reading to do)

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The Art & Science of Proposals

You will be showing them...
- What you want to do
- Why you want to do it
- How you want to do
- What will be the positive result?

While convincing them your project is ......
- relevant
- feasible
- worth the donors' time and money
- best implemented by YOU
- going to produce something of value for the donor

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Before the Call for Proposals is issued.......

Step 1:
Donor mapping and analysis

Step 2:
- Desk review
- Meetings & contacts
- Gathering intelligence

Step 3:
- Building relationships
- Building reputation

Reputation & Visibility

Coffee Break

What is a *WIN THEME*?

- *A concept presented in your proposal that is designed to **persuade** the donor of your unique suitability to deliver the project.*

- *A single aspect that marks you as **uniquely suited** for a given project.*

- *Woven and expressed throughout your proposal.*

Source: James England, *Why Should They Choose You - Use Win Themes to Differentiate Your Proposal*

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How do you build a Win Theme?

Step 1: Identify client's concerns
- Know your donor's broad **priorities**
- Know your donor's proposal-specific **interests**

Step 2: Identify your strengths
- What can/do we showcase your **specialty**?
- **Which of these align with the client's interests?**

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How do you choose a Win Theme?

Step 3: Admit your weaknesses
- What funding opps are we losing, and why?
- What does the donor think are our weaknesses?
- How can we neutralize these in our win theme?

Step 4: Identify your competition
- Competitive Analysis
- What does the donor think of our competitors?
- What distinguishes us from the herd? What do we offer that is superior?

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Source: ibid.

What makes a good Win Theme?

- Brings **direct value** to the client
- Is **provable** by citing past experience, test data, M&E findings, testimonials, etc.
- It is something **you alone can offer**, and the client believes **only you can do**
- Can be stated in a single simple sentence ("This proposal is about……………")
- Reminder: One proposal can have several distinct win themes – part of a bigger "**storyboard**"

Source: *ibid.*

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Group Work

What is AMSHC's win theme?

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Introduction to Logical Frameworks

Competitive and Effective Roads to Achievements

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"**If you don't know where
you are going,
any road will take you there.**"

Proverb from South Africa

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Problem Tree Analysis….

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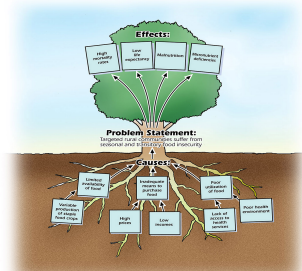
Theory of Change

- Explicit description of **how you and others expect change** to occur in the **environment** where the project is implemented.

- Also called the '**means-to-end**' logic or a 'development pathway'.

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Theory of Change: an example

- Training advanced farmers as extension agents in their own communities.

- 'Advanced' farmers learn new crop production knowledge → pass this on to other farmers → improve community crop production → less food insecurity

  What is the **evidence** that this in fact will work?

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Theory of Change: checking the evidence

It **may** work, but several studies show that expert farmers.......

- don't necessarily make good trainer...
- have **few incentives** to impart knowledge and lose competitive edge...
- are more '**advanced**' because they have more resources...
- may have **cultural barriers** to mixing with poorer farmers...

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AMSHC's Theory of Change

Almost always...........

- Local Albanian NGOs can leverage resources, implement projects, and produce a beneficial impact on the country and its citizens

  or

- Albania's development and European Integration will be advanced through a vibrant civil society

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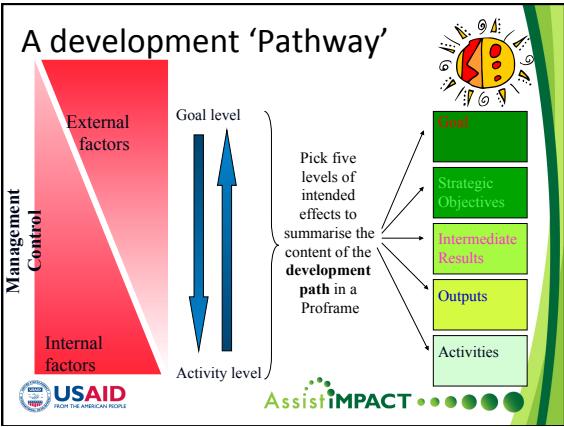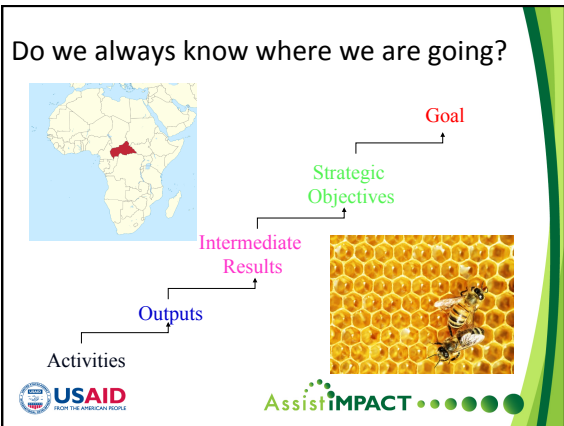FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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A development 'Pathway'

Do we always know where we are going?

5 levels to get us to where we want to go......

Impact Pathway: based on problem analysis

Ends

Means

Objectives Statements		
Goal		
Strategic Objectives		
Intermediate Results		
Outputs		
Activities		

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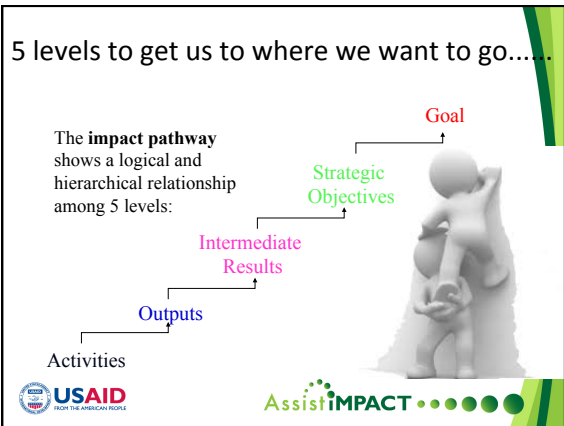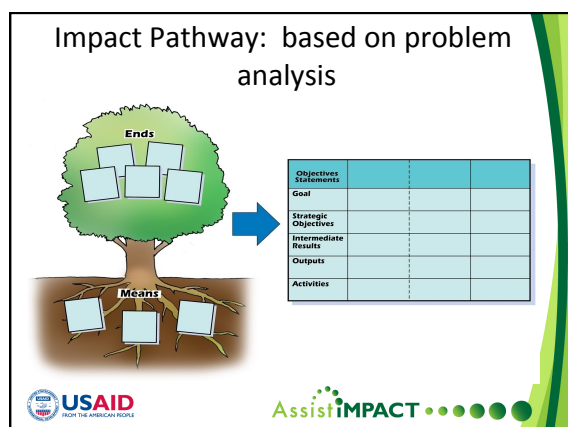
Goal

Goal

✓ The Goal describes the wider and longer-term development aim of the project.

✓ The project is only one among many factors contributing to success at this level.

Example: Farmers in Central Albania have increased incomes

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Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objectives

✓ SOs describe the **beneficial effects** resulting from the positive changes in behaviour or systems observed at IR level.

✓ SOs should realistically be achievable by the end of the project (EOP).

✓ SOs ensure project focus, i.e. they provide the central reason why the project is proposed.

Example: Women farmers have increased vegetable production

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Intermediate Results

Intermediate Results

✓ IRs indicate the behavioral or systems change anticipated from the successful delivery of Outputs to users.

✓ IRs focus on the end-users' (participants, target audience, clients) use of the goods, services and knowledge provided by the project:

  ✓ Adoption, uptake, 'reach', coverage, access to, demonstrable evidence of satisfaction with project Outputs.

  ✓ 'Behavior' change among people, systems, or organizations.

Example: Women farmers in Berat are applying enhanced vegetable production techniques

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Using IRs to test your 'Theory of Change'

• IRs focus on **behavioral or systems change** to see if end-users (participants, target audiences, clients) are responding as anticipated.

• IRs begin to capture unanticipated +/- **effects**.

• Findings from monitoring IRs should determine the project manager's next course of action.

• Without behavioral change at IR-level, don't expect to achieve your SOs!

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Outputs

Outputs

✓ Outputs represent what the project delivers – goods, services, knowledge, skills, attitudes, policy advice.

✓ Outputs arise directly from the successful implementation of activities.

Example: 50 women farmers have improved knowledge and skills on vegetable production

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Activities

Activities

✓ Project Activities describe the **functions** that need to be undertaken and managed in order to deliver the Outputs.

Example: To train 50 women farmers on vegetable production techniques

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A hierarchy of logic to achieve…

GOAL
Strategic Objectives
Intermediate Results
Outputs
Activities

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Planning Down…

	Objectives Statements	Performance Indicator Statements	Measurement Methods / Data Sources	Critical Assumptions/ Risks
Goal				
Strategic Objectives				
Intermediate Results				
Outputs				
Activities				

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Activities Description

The heart of your project

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Activities: *What am I trying to do?*

- Present your activities in sufficient detail to show that you understand how to implement this project.

- Present how/why your activities and the way you implement them will lead to impact and results.

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Activities Description: Content

- **Organize by SOs and IRs** so the link between the activities and the results framework is <u>clear</u>.

- **Start each activity heading with a <u>verb</u>.**

- **Include one or two concise paragraphs per activity** outlining: **who, what, where, when and how**. Be as <u>specific</u> as possible (i.e., # of people that will be trained, who will conduct the training, for how long, topics that will be covered).

- **Give <u>consistent</u> types and amounts of information** for each activity.

- **Mention the "why" of the activity** to show why it's important and how doing it will lead to results.

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Activities Description: Tips

- **Make activity headings <u>consistent</u>** with the logical framework and all other components of the proposal (ie, M&E Plan, Implementation Plan, Budget, etc).
- **Use the <u>active voice</u>**, which forces you to specify who will do the activity. Don't say, "30 women farmers will be trained." Say, "The Project Officer will train 30 women farmers in vegetable production techniques and skills."
- **Show off your <u>capacities</u> and technical expertise!**
- **Make sure your writer strikes a <u>good balance</u> between giving precise information but not presenting it as too dry or clinical!**

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Group Work

- <u>Step 1</u>: Take notes for each activity on the
  Who? What? When? How?
- <u>Step 2</u>: Think of the selling points for each activity. *Why are they important? What is unique about your approach? What will happen after the activity is implemented?*

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Coffee Break

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Grants Management

…..good custodians of someone else's money

Application

Financial
Management

Milestone
Management

Policy &
Procedure
Compliance

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Grants Management Plans:

What am I trying to do?

- Convince the donor that you can <u>identify</u> the best place for their investments
- Convince the donor that you can <u>accomplish an overall result </u>through small investments
- Convince the donor that you can <u>monitor and oversee </u>all the grants

SUCCESS

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Grants Management Plans: Content

- **Identification of investments:**
  - Your process of setting selection criteria, application procedures, and identifying grantees
- **Monitoring and Compliance Mechanisms:**
  - Your process of monitoring grantees' performance and oversight of compliance
- **Technical, Administrative and Logistical Support:**
  - Describe the expected technical, administrative and logistical support your staff will offer to grantees
- **Coordination/Collaboration with other Donors**
  - Describe specifically how you will <u>coordinate</u> and <u>collaborate</u> with other NGOs, government agencies, donors, universities, research institutes, media, and community- based orgs.

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Grants Management Plans: Tips

- **Think strategically about what the entire program.** Grants are pieces of a larger puzzle. What are you trying to accomplish with all the individual pieces?

- **Keep communication and management lines clean and simple.** Be sure to include technical and management supervision, but keep it streamlined.

- **Demonstrate oversight of monitoring and compliance.** The donor is trusting you to manage their money, so convince them that you will

- **Create a boilerplate.** Many grants management processes will be similar, so create a boilerplate and simply adjust it for each proposal.

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Group Work

Write down key elements of
- Grants identification and selection
- Grants monitoring (programmatic)
- Grants oversight (financial & administrative)
- Reports
- Procedures, manuals, and controls

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Management Plans

Yes, I can…..

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Management Plans: *What am I trying to do?*

- Convince the donor that, with all your great ideas in place, you can implement the project.
- Convince the donor that you can comply with their rules and regulations
- Show that you are a strong organization with systems, policies, and procedures in place.

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Management Plans: Content

- **Project Implementation Management:**
  - Describe the team and their roles
  - Elaborate on any donor involvement, such as approval on major project decisions, regular meetings, field visits, etc.
- **Technical, Administrative and Logistical Support:**
  - Describe the expected technical, administrative and logistical support your staff will need and offer
- **Include information on policies and procedures:**
  - On financial management, procurement, PSEA, etc
- **Coordination/Collaboration with External Stakeholders**
  - Describe specifically how you will coordinate and collaborate with other NGOs, government agencies, donors, universities, research institutes, media, and community- based orgs.

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Management Plans: Tips

- **Think strategically about what the project needs to succeed.** Avoid bloating a management team to implement a project. Think of the roles and functions which are needed to implement the project, and then add the appropriate level of oversight.

- **Keep communication and management lines clean and simple.** Be sure to include technical and management supervision, but keep it streamlined.

- **Highlight the skills and expertise of key personnel.** This is especially true for directors and managers.

- **Create a boilerplate.** Many roles of management teams will be more or less the same among projects, so have a template prepared and simply adjust it to the needs of your proposal.

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Group Work

Create the <u>management plan table</u> with the following columns for your project:

Position	Level of Effort	Responsibilities

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Lunch

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Implementation Plans

The logical sequence of events

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Implementation Plans:
What am I trying to do?

- Convince the donor that you know the <u>logical sequence</u> of how to roll out your project.
- Show in-depth <u>understanding</u> of your <u>theory of change</u> in how the sequence of steps will lead to <u>impact</u> and <u>results</u>.
- Show in-depth understanding of how elections, seasons, holidays, external factors etc will impact your project's roll-out.

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Implementation Plans

- **List out activities by SO and IR** and be sure that ALL activity headings correspond to those in the <u>Activity Descriptions</u> section.

- **The Implementation Plan intersects with the <u>proposal budget</u>.**

- **Present the first year by months and out-years by quarter** because donors require more detail on year one activities and you should build in flexibility in your out-years.

- **Include a column for Person(s)/Partner Responsible** for each activity.

- **Don't forget management activities,** such as recruitment, project launch, monitoring and evaluation, etc...

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Implementation Plans: Tips

- **Be sure to <u>update</u> the Implementation Plan** when you make changes to the Activity Descriptions.

- **Show <u>logic</u> behind the way you envision activities rolling out.**

- **Take into account <u>seasons</u>,** ie winter when travel is difficult, summer when people are away, holidays when certain activities should or should not occur...

- **Start with <u>major milestones</u>,** and then work backwards to make them happen.

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Group Work

Create a rough implementation plan

Activity	Resp.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Start-up		X					
Activity 1			X	X	X		
Activity 2				X	X	X	X
Activity 3						X	X
Activity 4		X	X	X	X	X	X
M&E			X		X		X
Reports					X		X

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Organizational Capacity Statements

Great idea, but why should I pay you to do

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Org. Capacity Statements:
What am I trying to do?

- Convince the donor that you are the best-placed NGO to do this project!

- Convince the donor that you have the proven track record, skills, expertise, and management systems in place to deliver results.

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Organizational Capacity Statement

- **Organizational Overview:** describe when you were founded, your mission, your staff structure, and your main activities.

- **Experience in Relevant Sector(s):** focus on your capacities in that particular sector or programming area.

- **Brief highlights:** of 3 to 5 highly relevant, successful projects from the last 3 to 5 years. Focus on large-scale, externally funded projects if possible or, if relevant, successful pilot projects ready to go to scale.

- **Highlight work which has already been done and accomplishments already achieved.**

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Org Capacity Statement: Tips

- **Mirror the priorities of the call for proposals:** Mention all relevant areas highlighted by the call for proposals that your proposed project will address. Highlight the unique elements of the proposed project in which you have proven experience and competitive advantages.

- **Write and format effectively:** Use persuasive, concise language. Use bullet points to summarize and bold font to highlight key strengths. Utilize textboxes (judiciously) with brief highlights of key projects or innovations in the relevant sector(s).

- **Don't forget administrative capacities.**

- **Talk about systems, policies, and procedures** to manage projects well.

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Group Work

- Write down 3 accomplishments of AMSHC's grant-making
- Write down 3 administrative accomplishments

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Coffee Break

M&E Plans

measuring your success…..

Monitoring cycle

M&E Plans:
What am I trying to do?

- Convince the donor that you know how and can <u>measure the success</u> of the project

- Convince the donor that you are not only doing the day-to-day work but focu...

M&E Plan

- **Baseline Study,** establishes where the indicators are *before* you start your project.
- **Monitoring (on-going),** shows how you will gather data and respond to it on a daily basis as you implement the project.
- **Mid-Term Evaluation (only if your project is longer than 24 months),** to assess if major changes are required.
- **Final Evaluation,** to document results, impacts, sustainability, effectiveness, & efficiency. And to gain insights into lessons learned and best practices.

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M&E Plan: Tips

- **Consider indicators very carefully**, they will lead the M&E Plan and Evaluation and they are contractual obligations!

- **Do not plan to conduct a mid-term evaluation if the proposed project is for less than two years,** unless the donor requests one in the call for proposals.

- **Mention that indicators and targets will be reviewed and approved by the donor upon project start up,** as these usually form a contractual obligation to the donor.

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Group Work

- Pick one indicator from your logical framework at the Intermediate Result level and one indicator from the Activity level
- Fill out the PMEP format for each of the two indicators

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Strong Background Sections:
The Mathematical Solution

The Mathematical Way

In math, we can check for mistakes by doing the opposite of what we have just done. For example:

100-20-5= 75

We can double check for errors, by adding (the opposite of subtracting)

20 + 5 +75 = 100

The Mathematical Way

The same principle applies to the relationship between the background statement and the activities.

- The problem description in the **background statement should logically lead to the activity** which will address it. *You should create your own justification for your project.*

The Mathematical Way

- Problem 1: Women farmers in Albania don't have titles to their land.
  - Activity 1: Awareness-raising on the land tenancy law
  - Activity 2: Legal assistance
  - Activity 3: Counseling to use land titles to obtain loans
- **NOT:** Trainings on seed storage and marketing

The Mathematical Way

- Problem 2: Civil society leaders lack capacity to operate NGOs
  - Activity 1: Leadership development
  - Activity 2: Financial management training
  - Activity 3: Creation of strategies
- **NOT:** Form a coalition of CSOs to represent their interests to government

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Tips

The problem description should never….

- paint a picture so bleak that the problem could never be solved
- go too deep in history
- be too broad and holistic

The problem description should always leave a window of opportunity open that the activities of your proposal will fill.

Sustainability Plans

What legacy will the donor's money have?

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Sustainability Plans:
What am I trying to do?

- Convince the donor that you are using their money to create something of lasting value.

value

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Sustainability Plan

- **Institutional,** how will your NGO be <u>stronger</u>, more <u>capable</u> after the project? How will other institutions that you worked with be <u>stronger</u>, more <u>capable</u> in the future?
- **Financial,** how can activities, results, and impact continue without the donors' money?
- **Technical (Programming),** what are the <u>lasting impacts</u> of the project? How will beneficiaries and partners be inspired to <u>continue</u> this work? Who can assume <u>responsibility</u> for some of the things you will create?
- **Environmental (maybe not applicable),** how will the project ensure the environment is able to <u>continue</u>?

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Tips

Think about and highlight:

- How can others (beneficiaries and partners) take up this cause?
- How can sustainable institutions take responsibility for activities?
- What results will achieve lasting change?
- What capacities will be built for the future?

Group Work

List the ways in which your grant-giving to NGOs will help them to become sustainable in the future.

Writing Strong Executive Summaries

Concise and Compelling

Executive Summaries: Guiding Questions

- Is your summary an **interesting** read? Does it make the reader want to go into the details of your proposal?
- Is your summary **convincing**?
- Does your summary show your project to be **realistic** and **feasible**?
- Is your summary linked to the call for proposals? To the donors' strategy?

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Executive Summary: Tips

- **Keep this section to two pages maximum** if no length is specified in the call for proposals.

- **Link it directly to the call for proposals or donor strategy.** Copy-paste!

- **Keep any reference to the problem brief** – focus on the solutions proposed!

- **Rewrite or paraphrase from the different proposal sections** – don't just lift sentences or phrases.

- **Use bullet points and text boxes** to summarize and bold font to highlight key strength

- **Make it interesting and easy to read!**

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Executive Summary: Template

Paragraph 1: Briefly state:
- Who you are
- The call for proposals you are responding to
- How much money and time are you requesting
- What general approach you will use to implement the project

Paragraph 2-4: Problem you are addressing

Paragraph 5-6: Your project's proposed solution

Paragraph 7: Why are you (and your partners) best placed to carry out this work?

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Lunch

Preparing Competitive Budgets

What is a budget (philosophically)?

- your proposal expressed in *numbers* (as opposed to the narrative which is expressed in words)

- is a *mirror image* of your proposal

- your opportunity to show the donor the *efficiency* of your project and *value for money*

Why this Guidance?

- Improve the accuracy of proposal budgets

- Ensure adherence to donor guidelines on cost applications

- Improve the quality of grant compliance

- Avoid financial risks to your organization

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A Donor's Fair Share

As a guiding rule, a donor should only have to pay its **fair share** to implement a project. Without proper cost allocation, you are forcing them to subsidize the work of other projects!

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Golden Rules of Budgets

- #1: Create your budget, with two people in mind: your donor and your auditor!

- #2: Don't assume that your donor does not know local prices. Do your homework and be accurate!

- #3: Check your work and your excel formulas before submitting

- #4: Be consistent with terms (between the budget and the proposal)

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Standard Cost Categories (US)

- Personnel
- Supplies
- Fringe Benefits
- Contractual
- Travel
- Program Costs
- Equipment
- Indirect Charges

Personnel

- Only staff directly employed by this project

- # staff x USD rate x Level of Effort %

- Segregate Expatriate and National staff

- 4-5% annual salary increase is a good rule of thumb for multi-year projects

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Fringe Benefits

- Percentage of total salaries in detail budget

- Describe breakdown of fringe rate (%) in budget narrative

- Remember to comply with local labor law and Government employee regulations

- Allocated to project budget at same percentage LOE (Level of Effort) as salaries

Travel

- Separate int'l airfare and domestic airfare *(to facilitate prior approval for int'l travel)*

- In budget notes, indicate # trips, # people traveling, origin and destination country

- Details for each trip are sometimes required *(in Request For Proposals)*

- Separate hotel and per diem *(not lump-sum"travel expenses")*

- In-country and local transportation needs to be auditable and calculable

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Equipment

- <u>Only</u> items with unit cost => 5,000 USD or 3,000 EUR

- Itemize all equipment *(to facilitate donor prior approval of capital expenditures)*

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Supplies

- Equipment and Motorcycles < 5,000 USD

- Motorbikes in separate line item *(to facilitate prior approval for restricted goods; motorcycles are vehicles)*

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Contractual

- All consultants

- All "Professional Fee" items

- ALL SUB-AWARDS! And SUB-GRANTS!

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Program Costs

- **All project materials** *(goods going directly to project beneficiaries)*

- **Commodities should be separated out (ie, seeds) whereas complete items (ie, demonstration plots) should be average amounts**

- **All activity costs**

- **Separate training costs** *(to facilitate approval for participant training)*

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Prior Approvals

Consider the following items when developing budget notes (in order to get prior approval):

•Memberships, Subscriptions, and Professional Activities, including international conferences relevant to the project's objectives

•Agricultural Commodities

•Used equipment

•Fertilizer

•Medical Supplies and Medicines

•International Travel

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Cost Share Guidance

• Can be cash or in-kind

• Show cost share $ in detail, AND state it as a percentage of total activity costs in the budget narrative and as a footnote on the summary and detail spreadsheets

• Cost share entire line items as much as possible

• Cost share international travel and capital equipment, to avoid donor restrictions

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In-Kind Cost Share Guidance

Reportable Contributions on Auditable Financial Statements:

• Volunteer Labor Hours – Skilled

• Donated Facilities and Land

• Existing equipment donated for permanent use

• Donated project materials

• Regional and Headquarters staff time and expenditures

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Indirect Charges

You can charge it only if the donor allows you:

• UN: 6%

• EU: 7%

• Others: 5-10%

• USG: your NICRA rate

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Ju falenderoj për pjesëmarrjen tuaj gjatë katër ditëve të fundit.

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Wrap Up and Evaluation

- Plenary discussion
- Written evaluations

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